

Lithuanian Voters Reject Communists

Pro-Independence Forces Elected to Assembly

MOSCOW, Feb. 25—In the Soviet Union's first multi-party elections in 72 years, Lithuanians overwhelmingly rejected the Communist Party and elected a legislature that is expected to press Moscow hard for independence, perhaps as soon as this year, according to results announced today.

The independence movement Sajudis scored a landslide victory. Out of 90 declared winners, 72 had been endorsed by Sajudis. The figure already gives it a majority in the 141-seat Lithuanian parliament, and it is expected to win most of the run-off elections scheduled for next month.

The Lithuanian Communist Party won 29 seats. It had split with Moscow in December and endorsed a platform of independence and social democracy in an attempt to regain prestige in the republic. But the party's transformation was clearly not enough to persuade voters to keep it the dominant power in the republic.

Like various Communist Party organizations in Eastern Europe, the Lithuanian Communists will now be playing a minority role in a coalition government. Such a reversal is historic not only for Lithuania, but for the entire Soviet Union. When Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks won less than 25 percent of the vote in nationwide legislative elections in 1918, Lenin, with the aid of Red Army troops, put an end to what he called "parliamentary cretinism" and began seven decades of one-party rule.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who has steadily opened up the political system, is hoping that by reforming the national Communist Party organization—purging the old guard and rewriting the platform to keep pace with evolving public opinion—he will avoid, at least for a while, the fate of the Lithuanian Communists.

"Time and events obviously moved too fast for the Communists in Lithuania," Sajudis leader Vytautas Landsbergis said. "But Moscow and Gorbachev may have bought themselves more time" by ending the party's constitutionally guaranteed monopoly on power.

In nearly all of the republic's electoral districts, the candidates

Pro-Independence Movement Wins Legislative Elections in Lithuania

LITHUANIA, From A1

were united on the issue of independence, differing only on timing and strategy. The Lithuanian Communists, led by First Secretary Algirdas Brazauskas, were simply unable to change their historic image.

"Nobody knows better than I do how dirty our history has been," Brazauskas said in a recent interview in Vilnius. The Lithuanians, despite showing greater respect for the Communists than before, according to opinion polls, clearly were not ready to forgive them at the ballot box.

Typically, candidates tried to distance themselves from their party memberships, and if they had never been Communists, they advertised the fact. Many of the Communists who ran well were those also affiliated with Sajudis. Of the 29 Communists who won seats, 13 were backed by Sajudis. Social Democrats won nine seats, and the Greens and Christian Democrats won two each.

While Brazauskas appealed for gradualism in the movement for independence, most Sajudis candidates favor increased pressure on Moscow to allow the republic to

secede. Landsbergis said that when the legislature meets this spring, it is likely to declare Lithuania independent and begin a "tough dialogue" with the Kremlin.

Landsbergis said he expects Moscow, at first, to react by calling such a declaration "empty or even illegal." He said it was more important how the Kremlin responds "in fact"—whether it will accept the new parliament's "general right to rule" not only on the independence question but also in its control of the army and the internal security forces.

Although Sajudis leaders said they hope to lay the foundation for the independence process this year, they realize the mechanisms of separating from Moscow could take longer. "Even in the United States it took years after the Declaration of Independence for this independence to become a fact of life," Brazauskas said.

The Supreme Soviet, the national legislature in Moscow, is considering a bill on the mechanisms for secession that are at odds with the ambitions of every political leader of consequence in Lithuania.

Under the bill, a republic would have to hold a referendum, and even

if the required 75 percent voted for secession, it would be five years before the national Congress of People's Deputies could confirm the referendum and permit secession.

Sajudis leaders strongly oppose the bill. Even Brazauskas, who will undoubtedly play a key role in Lithuania's future dialogue with Moscow, said, "Five years is too much."

Gorbachev's strategy appears to be a holding action, to delay the inevitable as long as he can. The bill on secession is seen as one means, and so are Moscow's veiled threats of an economic blockade.

"If the Soviet Union blockades us economically, and if we have many difficulties and problems, then we will have to look at different variants," said Kazimera Prunskiene, a party leader who is also on the Sajudis ruling council.

The Lithuanians are considering not only how much resistance they can expect from Moscow, but also how much support they can expect from Washington and other Western capitals. Sajudis chairman Landsbergis poses the challenge much like those opposition leaders who have come to power in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

"We are testing Moscow, but we



ALGIRDAS BRAZAUSKAS
... split with Moscow didn't help

VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS
... Sajudis movement has majority

are also testing the West," Landsbergis said. "We want to know: What is the West? Are they mere merchants or do they have Christian, democratic principles—principles that extend to others as well as to themselves? We need clearly expressed support, and so far President Bush's words for us are quite reserved."

Because more than three-quarters of its population is ethnic Lithuanian, Lithuania's politics are less-complicated than elsewhere in the Baltics, where the picture is more uncertain.

Latvia and Estonia are holding parliamentary elections March 18. But many native Estonians and Lat-

vians, resenting and fearing the presence of large ethnic Russian populations, feel it is pointless to participate in any elections that are linked to, or acknowledge, Soviet power.

Some independence activists called citizens' councils have organized "alternative-elections" for shadow legislatures, bodies that would act without regard to Moscow and that intend to function as the organs of power after independence. Voting districts are laid out according to pre-World War II designations, and recent migrants to the republics—specifically Russians—are not permitted to vote.